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Issue Introduction: Linguistic Harms and Empowerment

Amber E. George

More and more, scholars (Shapiro & Copeland, 2005) are concerning themselves with the work of assessing respectful versus disrespectful representations of nonhumans in literature and elsewhere. Literary criticism takes this to task by exploring the animal point of view and stresses the development of consciousness to mitigate harmful representation. There has also been an increase in studying the anthropomorphic use of animals as metaphors or similes to refer to people, characteristics, or events. Linguistic and Ethological studies are ripe for investigating the insulting, and often contradictory, utterances that use nonhuman animals for their root (Schmauks, 2014).

Language is more than just the means through which people express themselves; the language we use overtly and covertly shapes people's thoughts, values, and perceptions of reality. If a society is inherently racist, then the spoken language is likely to reflect that racism. The same applies to speciesist language and using outdated phrases, such as "kill two birds with one stone," that subjugates and demeans animals. It is not just a matter of semantics or being politically correct; the language used reflects how people feel about animals. As Isaac Asimov stated, "to insult someone we call him "bestial." For deliberate cruelty and nature, "human" might be the greater insult" (Singh, 2005).

The trouble with speciesist language, is that it mindlessly relays prejudices and reinforces power differentials among species. There are, of course, individual acts of speciesism, which may be committed by anyone, and then there are institutional acts of speciesism, which involves economic, legal, and social factors that amount to power. Animals do not have the political, economic, or social power to be speciesist on an institutional level. While it may be true that most animals care more about how they are being treated than whether today's correct phrase or term is speciesist, it does not negate the fact that words matter.

The beautiful thing about language is that it continually changes. This issue explores Frank Palmeri's "On Cursing with Animals" to understand animal-based insults and how to move toward using terms that convey respect and consideration for animals. The essay suggests ways that eliminating oppressive language or biased terminology will help to change our views of ourselves and others.

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On Cursing with Animals

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Abstract

Cursing with animals—calling a person of whom we disapprove on moral grounds a snake, a worm, or a weasel—aims to degrade the object of the curse to the level of an animal. But such cursing or indignant name-calling is inaccurate and unfair to the named animals, because they are not immoral, at least not in the ways or to the extent that humans are. Snakes are not duplicitous betrayers; sharks are not predatory lenders, worms are not morally spineless. It lowers the animals to compare them to immoral humans. Using the work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas as well as ethologists, philosophers, and literary artists who have shared this insight, I suggest that those who justifiably feel indignant at the corrupt, deceitful, and powerful people who stand outside the reach of legal sanctions should describe such people not as animals or as inhumane, but as immoral humans—all too human.

Keywords: *language, cursing, animals*

In December 2018, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) called for altering idioms they deemed anti-animal, so that English speakers would say “bringing home the bagels” or “not feeding a fed horse” instead of “bringing home the bacon” or “not kicking a dead horse” (Wang, 2018). Predictably, responses on the internet mocked the idea, saying that the animal rights group had “jumped the shark” or “must have bigger fish to fry.” Such responses presume that it is acceptable to trivialize the suffering of animals, although respectful non-racist and non-sexist language is expected in references to humans. Also, by discounting the power of language to shape the world in which we live, they contribute to maintaining the conditions in which so many animals live. Critics assume that carrying bacon home to eat and frying fish are ways of treating animals in the material world that are so acceptable that to question them is laughable.

However, the claim that we should examine and avoid language that leads to abuse of animals merits serious consideration. As early as 1990, Carol J. Adams argued that everyday language masks the violence done to animals by referring to them as “carcasses” instead of “corpses” or parts of them as “meat” rather than “flesh” (1990, pp. 74-77). Furthermore, Noreen Mola and the Blacker Family drew attention a few years earlier to the importance of avoiding expressions that convey contempt for animals by calling someone a “bird-brain,” a “snake,” “a weasel,” or “chicken” (1986, p. 18). In 1988, Andrew Rowan cited the observation of Edmund Leach that most forms of obscenity involve one of three categories: 1) words for bodily functions, especially excretion and sex; 2) blasphemy or profanity; and 3) terms likening a human to an animal (Rowan, 1988, p. 3; Leach, 1964, p. 28).

Such uses of language are not trivial or inconsequential. Indeed, an examination of the effects of ordinary language usage has played a prominent role in discussions of the human treatment of nonhuman animals for the last thirty years. The focus here is not on metaphoric usages (“crocodile tears”) or similes (“like a vulture”), but on labelling that equates a human with a supposed morally inferior animal. Much of the recent work on everyday language has focused on interrogating dualistic thinking. Val Plumwood called for scholars to move beyond mapping dichotomies of gender and colonization onto the hierarchical distinction between nature and culture, nonhuman and human animals (1993, pp. 10, 41-68). Donna Haraway followed up on this call by using the term “naturecultures” throughout her

discussion of the intertwining histories of canine and human animals in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003). The critique of the hierarchized dichotomy of nature and culture, animal and human, has been further pursued in ecofeminist theory by Janet Birkeland (1993), Claire Jean Kim (2014), Greta Gaard (2017), and others. Annabelle Sabloff (2001) has focused on the way that dominant metaphors used by Euro-Americans for their relations with animals consistently place humans in the dominant role. Joan Dunayer, in *Animal Equality: Language and Liberation* (2001), traces through such human activities as factory farming, hunting, zookeeping, and vivisection the way that euphemistic language hides the pain, captivity, and deaths of billions of nonhuman animals every year.

Jacques Derrida directed attention to the senselessness of a binary between “the human” and “the animal” (2008, pp. 29-31, 47-8). However, he also repeatedly castigated anyone who asserts any biological continuum between humans and any other animals as “more asinine than any beast [*plus bête que les bêtes*]” (p. 30), a curious usage in light of the argument of this essay. Asses are not “asinine,” nor are those who accept evolutionary theory more stupid [*bête*] than beasts [*bêtes*].

Twentieth-century philosophies of language draw attention to the material consequences of language usage. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, a language forms the world in which its speakers live; their descriptions of the world shape their judgments, attitudes, and treatment of other members of that world, including other animals (1956, pp. 173-204). Ludwig Wittgenstein’s late work similarly emphasizes that “the speaking of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (2009, p. 23). The language we use has material consequences in the world; the degrading of animals in our speech results in injuries to animal bodies: for example, language presuming that sharks are vicious predators of humans helps excuse the human killing of millions of sharks each year.

Herzog, Rowan, and Kossow show how attitudes embedded in and influenced by language shape human actions; they draw attention to the consequences of attitudes that have produced a ranking of concern for animals used in research, with dogs and apes at the top of the hierarchy and rodents and snakes at the bottom (Herzog et al., 2001, pp. 59-61). Similarly, John H. Peterson observes that whales and elephants function as parts of different symbol systems among urban white Euro-Americans and in largely

non-white subsistence communities; “natural resources,” he concludes, “are culturally constructed” (1993, p. 172).

Expanding beyond the observations of Joan Dunayer and Noreen Mora, this analysis investigates what I call cursing with animals—the attribution of moral failings to nonhuman animals in order to condemn human moral offenses. Such cursing takes place when we call a man who betrays friends and cheats others a “snake” or a “rat”; a predatory exploiter of the vulnerable a “shark” or a “vulture”; a selfish, crude, entitled man a “pig”; a lazy hanger-on a “leech”; a lying double-dealer a “weasel”; or a low and vile cheater a “cockroach.” We consign the cursed person to another species on moral grounds, considering the animal to be inferior to (most) humans. One might first object to such speech because it unfairly and ominously degrades human beings to the level of animals. However, this analysis demonstrates how such usage does the opposite: it unfairly lowers animals morally to the level of (most) human beings.

Sharks do not kill wantonly to increase their wealth; they do not lend resources to the less well-off who, unable to keep up with exorbitant interest rates, are trapped in a vortex of debt. Snakes may have physically forked tongues, but they do not praise someone in public then secretly stab her in the back. Far from betraying their friends, rats will refuse chocolate in order to save unrelated rats from drowning (Underwood, 2015). A worm does not hypocritically pretend to show her backbone in standing up to injustice before she slithers ignobly away; she just slithers along, making no pretense of having a backbone. She is not reprehensible for being invertebrate. As Dunayer points out, pigs do not overeat, unlike other animals, including humans, and wolves are not sexually predatory and promiscuous, unlike humans who are called by their name (2001, p. 166). Certain species of leeches survive by attaching themselves to and eating the blood of mammals, birds, and fish; there is no violation of morality in this, unlike in the case of the lazy person or sycophant, who attaches herself to and consumes the food and goods of another. In each of these forms of behavior, animals do not act immorally, but humans do. Cursing with animals demonstrates a remarkable unfairness because it is inaccurate. It is more accurate to call each kind of person judged in the first paragraph—the predatory lender, the betrayer of friends, the cowardly hypocrite, the selfish egotist—not a snake, weasel, shark, or pig, but a human, one that is morally deficient.

It is true that humans sometimes use other animals to praise people, but not very often, and seldom to commend their moral strength. For instance, calling someone “lion-hearted” draws attention to their courage, often a praiseworthy moral trait, but not always: soldiers in an unjust war may exhibit courage, but for a morally corrupt cause. Humans may say a person is “busy as a bee” or an “eager beaver,” but the capacity for hard work is not one of the higher moral traits, and the tone is rather condescending. Someone may be described as not a loudmouth, but “quiet as a mouse,” yet that also implies being fearful or timid. Similarly, someone who is “meek as a lamb” may also be led easily to the slaughter; indeed, in Nietzsche’s critique of Christian morality, a lamb-like meekness signifies a contemptible lack and disguises poisonous resentment (1998, pp. 28-29). In other words, most instances of apparent moral praise using animal identifiers prove to be ambiguous.

Another kind of ambiguity arises from gendered and racialized ways of naming people as animals. Calling a woman “a fox” may seem to some (mostly male) speakers to be a compliment, but it identifies the woman only for being sexually desirable to the speaker, not for any character trait. The expressions “What a bitch!” or (more archaically) a “shrew” or “vixen” or (more recently) a “cougar” lie closer to the examples already given of cursing with animals; in some circles, though, “bitch” has been re-appropriated by women to commend other women as strong or admirable. However, these terms generally criticize women either for having their own voice or for being unresponsive to the speaker’s desire, but not for a moral failing. The same is true of the use of feline and bovine terms such as “catty,” “cow,” and, most strongly, “pussy” (which can also be used against men deemed insufficiently masculine). Similarly, naming people as animals can serve to demean racial or ethnic groups. Some politicians designate immigrants or members of a minority group as “animals” generally or “vermin,” to signify their supposed inferiority to the dominant human group. Racists have called people of African descent “monkeys” or “baboons.” One ethnic group may refer to another by the name of an animal they eat; thus, English people have long called French people “frogs.” Of all these usages, only the general term “animals” carries a connotation of moral condemnation because it connotes extreme violence, even though members of immigrant groups are usually less likely, at least in the U.S., to commit violent crimes than members of the dominant group.

Advancing arguments that bear on the thesis of this essay, two ethologists and a philosopher have recently maintained that the behavior of some nonhuman animals can be moral or at least proto-moral. Ethologist Frans de Waal (1996) argues that intelligent social animals such as chimpanzees, bonobos, elephants, and wolves exhibit many of the fundamental and necessary elements of morality. For de Waal, chimpanzees and, to a lesser extent, other great apes must display such constituents of moral behavior as cognitive empathy. This may include the ability to imagine what others are feeling and put oneself in their position, the internalization of rules, and an understanding of reciprocity and the need to sanction those who do not share (de Waal, 1996, p. 211). Marc Bekoff, also an ethologist, has affirmed de Waal's arguments, focusing more on the behavior of dogs than on that of apes, and stressing the role of play in the development of the concepts of fairness and justice (2009, pp. 116-26).

De Waal concludes that primates and other social nonhuman animals reveal proto-moral behavior—traits that were necessary for the evolution of morality—which remain much less developed than human morality. Bekoff takes the position that while nonhuman animals are capable of species-relative morality, their moral behavior differs from that of humans in degree if not in kind (2009, pp. 139-41). More recently, the philosopher Mark Rowlands (2015) has argued that a nonhuman animal can act morally based on emotions possessing a moral content and without being able to give a rational accounting of their actions; such an animal would resemble the character Myshkin in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* (1868). In Rowlands' view, there is no difference in kind or degree between the standing of a nonhuman as a moral subject and a human who exhibits moral behavior (2015, pp. 124-51). Although de Waal and Bekoff agree that nonhuman animals can be moral to a lesser degree than humans, and Rowlands maintains that they can be as moral as humans, none of these three thinkers argues that nonhuman animals can be *more* moral than humans. By contrast, three literary artists do make such a claim.

In the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," the longest piece in his *Essays* (1580, 1588), Michel de Montaigne argues that humans should not take pride in their ability to reason or act morally, because some nonhuman animals equal or surpass them in reasoning. He also argues that many animals understand what is fair and not fair, and act in accord with what they recognize as right more consistently than most humans. He cites many

anecdotes, most of them drawn from the ancient writer Plutarch, to support his contentions. For example, to illustrate the sense of justice, he tells of an elephant whose keeper was stealing half of the animal's food. When the elephant's owner one day gave her a full share of barley, the animal "glared at her driver and, with her trunk, set half the ration aside, to reveal the wrong done to her" (Montaigne, 1987, p. 31; trans. altered). Montaigne also recounts that when hunters have trapped an elephant in a deep pit, her fellows "promptly bring a great many sticks and stones to help her clamber out," thus prompting the essayist to declare that "there is a greater difference between one man and another than between some men and some beasts" (1987, p. 31; trans. altered).

But Montaigne goes further to argue that nonhuman animals have exceeded humans in their moral behavior: he praises the loyalty and affection of dogs who, when their master died, refused to eat and finally threw themselves on their master's funeral pyre (1987, p. 36). He also maintains that, unlike humans who have enslaved other humans, no lion has ever been enslaved to another lion, nor a horse to another horse. In his most severe indictment, he notes that humans have learned how to defeat and kill each other in war, destroying uncountable numbers of our own species—"not much there, it seems, to make them want to learn from us" (Montaigne, 1987, p. 38).

Jonathan Swift expands upon this last charge in his satire *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), drawing out its implications for the moral standing of humans. Like Montaigne, Swift inverts the common hierarchy that authorizes humans to curse others using the names of animals; amoral animals are not inferior or equivalent, but superior to immoral humans. In Book 2, when Gulliver visits a land inhabited by giants, after the traveler has given a brief history of the previous century of wars in Europe, the peaceful king of the giants is astonished that the account contains only a "heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, [and] banishments" (Swift, 1967, p. 172). Gulliver, not learning from this good ruler, seeks to ingratiate himself with the king by offering him the secret of gunpowder, whose destructive power he describes graphically. The wise king, however, refuses the gift, horrified that Gulliver could propose such an idea while remaining unmoved at all the "scenes of blood and desolation" that he described so proudly (Swift, 1967, p. 175).

Gulliver does not understand the king's objection to his proposal until the middle of the fourth and last book of his travels. He has again been boasting of the destructive power of humans' military technology, which in his day, he reports, could result in "ships sunk with a thousand men, twenty thousand killed on each side; dying groans, limbs flying in the air, . . . trampling to death under horses' feet; . . . fields strewn with carcasses left for food to dogs; . . . plundering, stripping, ravishing, burning, and destroying" (Swift, 1967, p. 294). Like the king of the giants, the rational horse to whom Gulliver is speaking cuts him off at this point, explaining that he does not condemn scavengers for eating the corpses of animals whom others have killed—that is according to their nature and the way they survive. However, he becomes angry when he hears of a species of animal who use their reasoning ability to develop the most effective technologies, such as cannons and high-powered explosives, for killing and maiming others of their own kind (Swift, 1967, pp. 294-5). We might update Gulliver's list of weaponry by adding modern military technologies such as machine guns, land mines, poison gas, anthrax, nuclear bombs, cluster bombs, napalm, and drone bombers. Furthermore, the panoply of ancient and modern techniques of torture count among the distinctive accomplishments of the human species.

The conventional order of beings (decided by Europeans) places the civilized (Europeans) in the highest rank, with savages below them, and nonhuman animals at the bottom. Through the perspective of the rational horse, however, Swift inverts this hierarchy. In his critique, the rational animals occupy the highest place, with the Yahoos, who resemble dark-skinned savages, i.e., non-Europeans, in the middle. In contrast, the lowest rank of the corrected hierarchy is occupied by self-proclaimed civilized Europeans who employ their reasoning ability mostly in order to develop more effective means of killing, maiming, and inflicting pain on their fellow humans. Gulliver must explain in simple terms to his pacific equine host that "a soldier is a Yahoo hired to kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him, as possibly he can" (Swift, 1967, p. 293).

Reflecting on the mistaken human presumption of superiority over other animals leads Montaigne and Swift to formulate sharp critiques of civilization. For Montaigne, the indigenous people of Brazil, who allegedly cooked their enemies once they had been killed, were not as savage as Europeans who, for differences of religious belief, we know burned their

fellows at the stake while they were still alive (1968, p. 155). Similarly, Swift's rational horse views civilized peoples as more reprehensible and less moral than nonhuman animals. The horse, Gulliver reports, "looked upon us as a sort of animals to whose share, by what accident he could not conjecture, some small pittance of *Reason* had fallen, whereof we made no other use than by its assistance to aggravate our *natural* corruptions" (1967, p. 306).

In *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), H. G. Wells implies a similar recognition when his narrator returns from Moreau's Pacific island to perceive London prostitutes as wounded deer and mewling cats, and workingmen staggering down the street as disoriented sheep who have been struck with a debilitating disease called the gid (1998, p. 204-205). The visitor has witnessed the work of the vivisector Moreau, and, after the death of Moreau and his assistant, has lived for months on the island, the only human by birth among animals whom Moreau tried to render human by immersing them in his "bath of burning pain" (Wells, 1998, p. 120). After these experiences, he understands how close his condition as a human-animal is to that of the animal-human Beast Men, who have been vivisected to make them human. He understands that the language of culture merely provides a thin veneer to cover the disciplining, exploitation, and slow killing of both human and other animals that civilization accomplishes and on which it is based. As Nietzsche wrote a few years before Wells' novel, "How much blood and horror lies at the basis of all 'good things'!" (1998, p. 42). Also relevant is Walter Benjamin's aphorism from 1947: "There is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism" (1978, p. 256). Those who curse by calling offending humans animals contribute to such injurious work. Presuming the moral superiority of civilized humans and the immorality of other animals prepares the way for justifying their mistreatment, pain, and deaths.

There are many neutral animals whom we do not invoke in order to demean, dispraise, or derogate other humans. We do not curse a person by calling her a trout, a starling, or a cheetah. As I have noted, the moral nature of the animals with whom we curse does not resemble the moral character of the people whom we curse. Toads are not slavish sycophants, or toadies (although human toad-eaters who worked for charlatans in previous centuries were willing to swallow supposedly poisonous toads in order to prove the efficacy of the nostrum sold by their employer); moles are not spies, informers, or traitors; sponges do not live off their fellows without giving

anything in return. How then do the animals with whom we curse other humans serve that purpose? The anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued that in many, perhaps most, cultures some animals arouse a feeling of repugnance tied closely to a visceral conviction that they are unclean, disgusting, and not fit to eat (2002, pp. 51-60). In ancient Israel, snakes, insects, and pigs triggered such a feeling, and so has the now endangered pangolin among the Lele people of central Africa. Douglas speculates that none of these animals are inherently dirty or unhealthy to eat. But snakes and spiders are land animals that do not go on four legs; pigs do not have cloven hooves and chew the cud, like other animals fit to be eaten in Leviticus; and pangolins are covered with scales, although they do not live in water as fish do.

What inspires the revulsion, in Douglas's view, is that such animals violate or combine categories that the culture has established. In ancient Israel, one could eat creatures who swim in water and have scales and fins; creatures of the air with two legs, wings, and feathers; and land creatures with four legs and cloven hooves who chew the cud. Other kinds of creatures, who did not conform to these categories, aroused an intense feeling of disgust. As causes of avoidance and wariness, however, such creatures possess a kind of power; snakes cause fear and revulsion, but also exert an intense fascination in Christian cultures. Pangolins are highly taboo, but, as Douglas recounts, the Lele ritually kill a pangolin once a year, and hold a feast in which all members of the community participate. Everyone obtains a share of the animal's power and blessing through what they consider the animal's self-sacrifice and the communal meal (Douglas, 2002, pp. 205-209).

This is the kind of anomalous, category-defying animal that is invoked when cursing as animals others who violate our social code with impunity. Cursing people with such animals places them not only outside the human community, but even outside the category of clean animals. Douglas observes that the cursed animals prove to be socially useful as the waste of the system that must be expelled yet are highly honored too—extremely low and extremely high but not common or mediocre. The cursed and sacred animal occupies a position like that of Oedipus in ancient Greek culture. He occupies a place lower than other humans, supposedly like that of a nonhuman animal, as an incestuous parricide. But he also rises above others by conferring benefits on the community by lifting the plague on his city and blessing the land that shelters him at his death.

It seems that animals are used to curse people because their reprehensible, supposedly animal-like behavior falls outside the reach of legal, religious, or customary judgments. Offenses that cannot be sanctioned by institutional means cause indignation that cannot find an outlet through established sanctions. We do not call a murderer, thief, rapist, embezzler, perjurer, or fraudster by animal names; convicted by the law, they are accurately designated as murderer, thief, or rapist, and so on. This account may not work for every species of animal with whom we curse other people, but it seems unlikely that any single explanation would account for all cases.

Cursing with animals enables us to express the indignation that accompanies our judgments of humans who show themselves to be duplicitous, treacherous, shameless, exploitative, harassing, or selfish, but have received no punishment. The speaker is trying to use cursing, as satire is still used, to enforce social norms. In *The Power of Satire* (1960), literary critic Robert C. Elliott provides an extraordinary analysis of relations between cursing and satire, tracing the development of satire from early practices of cursing in Persian, Greek, and Irish cultures. Satire appears to be an artistic elaboration of cursing, which was sometimes believed to have the power of inflicting physical punishment upon a malefactor.

The intensity of our disapproval is indicated by the sounds that typically constitute the imprecation—the plosives, sibilants, and percussives in “Pig!” “Snake!” “Shark!” “Weasel!” “Leech!” and similar phonemes in other languages. The exclamation marks signal the emotional investment that defines these curses. Such intense emotion waits to be expressed because the reprehensible actions and behaviors fall outside the reach of legal or religious sanction; the indignation they cause cannot find an outlet through established procedures. In fact, it is healthy to feel this indignation and want to exact some justice and accountability for the offenses of the powerful who often remain untouched by the legal system—the cheaters who take more than they give, the canny, respectable fraudsters who have a knack for diverting flows of money into their own pockets and mistreating those with less of it. They violate the social code, yet they are not sanctioned in any other way.

The earliest Romans recognized the importance of cursing those who violated social norms through the practice of *occentare*—“chanting against” the offenders and calling on the gods to punish them. However, in their first legal code, the Twelve Tables, the Romans sought to outlaw the practice in order to protect powerful patricians and office-holders from such public

cursing, a rare form of public accounting. Fritz Graf traces the genealogical relation between *occentare* and satire (2005, pp. 196-200), observing that cursing excludes its object from the social group whose norms have been violated (2005, p. 193).

It might be a good idea to modify our practice of cursing, not like the early Romans did to shield the powerful, but to destigmatize the practice for morally inoffensive animals. Those who feel justified indignation at the lack of accountability could refrain from using animals as scapegoats or substitutes for hypocritical, lying, or exploitative human beings. We might say of people who egregiously behave this way, not that they are some species of other animals, but that they are unethical, immoral humans, yet not inhuman or animalistic.

When humans in the U.S. alone each year kill billions of land animals from industrial farms where they are treated as meat-making machines, it seems incorrect to call such a system inhumane, or not human. As Nietzsche (1996) would say, it seems all too human. We might do well also to listen to Nietzsche's answer to a question he poses aphoristically: "We [humans] do not regard animals as moral beings, but do you think that animals consider us moral?" (2004, p. 162). The response takes the form of a brief fable of an earlier period when animals spoke the same language, and one of them consoled another by reflecting, "Humanity is a prejudice of which we animals at least are free" (Nietzsche, 2004, p. 162). Believing ourselves to be humane, to evince a humanity morally superior to other animals, is a prejudice to which we humans are almost universally subject. Our common language inculcates and confirms this belief: to be cruel is to be inhumane, we say. Yet, if one species is conspicuously not humane in the sense of being compassionate and considerate of other species, that would be us. Many, perhaps most, humans are simply not humane. Through a careful analysis of *Gulliver's Travels* and other fictional texts, the literary critic Jonathan Lamb has shown that to be humane, to show humanity, is actually to place oneself outside the human; it is precisely to judge (most) humans as inhumane (2006, pp. 169-77).

Those inclined to feel indignation might reassess the use of animal names as terms of blame and the words "human" and "humane" as terms of praise, might work to transvalue the names of animals used as imprecations. Whenever we are tempted to call a sexually aggressive, sexist man a "pig," a person with no integrity a "worm," or a sycophant a "leech," a coward a

“chicken,” we can reflect that that is unfair to pigs, worms, leeches, and chickens, who do not display any of the morally offensive behaviors attributed to them in the curses. Indeed, it is likely that each animal has its species-relative morality, some of which may overlap with ours, and others not. In addition, some individuals of any species may act in less (species-relative) morally good ways than others, while some may behave better.

The gains offset the seeming loss that results from renouncing cursing with animal names. It often happens that, for those who choose a vegetable-based diet, the seeming restriction of not eating meat proves to be not a constraint, but an invitation to explore the rich tastes and nutritious world of vegetables, fruits, berries, grains, nuts, and spices. Similarly, the possibilities for describing and designating other animals may open up a new world for us if we do not consider them embodiments of degradation and sources of repulsion. Those who study sharks, worms, or leeches will be glad to share with you what wondrous creatures they are.

Many people want to be fair to animals. They need to be so in their practice of speech as well as in their other activities, recognizing, as the PETA spokesperson said, “Words matter, and as our understanding of social justice evolves, our language evolves along with it” (Wang, 2018). We may also work on changing the way we communicate in order to alter the way we and others think, and thus how we act. As Noreen Mola and the Blacker Family wrote: “Liberate your language, for it’s an important step in liberating all animals!” (Nola, 1986, p. 18). The way we construct and move through the world depends closely on the language we use, on the way we represent nonhuman animals to others, and the way others talk about these animals to us.

How then should we speak in order to help animals? It might not be the best approach to mirror the current practice and, when we see a nonhuman animal violating the code of her species, to call her a certain kind of human. It also seems unlikely that comparing other animals with humans only in ways that commend the other animals would improve their treatment, praising, for example, a chimpanzee or an elephant for making art or adorning herself, just as humans do. There is no doubt that we should cease cursing with animals, but it is unclear what new practice of language might succeed the old one. The new approach must be respectful of and accurate concerning nonhuman animals, and simple and unvarnished in sanctioning immoral human actors.

What should we say, for example, if people want, out of justifiable indignation, to condemn those who are most privileged and contribute most to the killing of entire forms of life—executives of oil and gas companies, of factory farms, of gigantic banks? They are not other animals, not sharks, pigs, snakes, toads, vultures, leeches, cockroaches, insects, or worms. They stand morally lower than other animals, including those for whose deaths they are responsible, whom their actions threaten with disappearance. Montaigne would ask if it is not the wealthy, the powerful, the civilized, and the politicians whom they buy, who kill and eat members of other species and their own. They are all too human in accumulating capital through needless suffering and death. We could wish that they were more like animals.

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JCAS Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established to foster academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal to facilitate communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed in any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Since a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

Review Process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript Requirements

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow APA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American English grammar spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have no endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper

(of no more than 250 words). A brief autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation email address, and full contact details.

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